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September 25, 2020

Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission  
c/o Shawna Pieske, Commission Secretary  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
P.O. Box 200701  
Helena, Montana 59620-0701

Re: Tepee Lake Petition

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for reviewing the following petition to limit Tepee Lake to manually powered boats only. This jewel of the North Fork of the Flathead River valley is a small, shallow, fishless lake that is treasured by landowners, neighbors and visitors for its peace and tranquility. There is no history of any motors on the Lake. We ask that you make a rule to preserve the opportunity for everyone, today and tomorrow, to experience this rustic piece of Montana heritage the way it has been for generations.

Sincerely,

Rachel Potter  
on behalf of co-petitioners

See also:

- Tepee Petition Support Letters
- North Fork Preservation Association Letter



Ken Stolz

BEFORE THE DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS  
OF THE STATE OF MONTANA

In the matter of the adoption of a New ) RULEMAKING PETITION  
 Rule pertaining to limiting Tepee Lake )  
 in Flathead County to manually )  
 operated watercraft. )

TO: All Concerned Persons

1. Petitioners: Rachel Potter, 121 Grand Fir Lane, Columbia Falls, Montana, 406-892-2446, jrepotter@centurytel.net (Contact). Kurt Borge (Manhattan, MT) Michael Borge (Missoula), Marguerite Kaminski (Whitefish) Charles Potter (Columbia Falls).

**2. How the Petitioners will be adversely affected.**

The petitioners comprise all cabin owners on Tepee Lake. However, we are also advocating for our North Fork neighbors, other Montana citizens and Forest visitors, water quality, and the rare and remarkable Common Loon. There is no current or past use of motors on Tepee Lake. We believe unless a rule is made, it is inevitable a neighbor or visitor will eventually put a motorboat or jet ski on the Lake leading to:

- Loss for all above of a unique and rapidly diminishing opportunity to experience a rustic, quiet lake with Loons and other wildlife, under some of the most dramatic scenery found anywhere, from the ease of a public road.
- Loss of a precious piece of North Fork heritage, as generations have enjoyed the Lake just as it still is today, quiet and without motors.
- Loss of secure nesting habitat for the Common Loon. Human activity, noise and wave action can all lead to nesting failure, especially in a shallow lake with no protected bays.
- Loss of water quality. This shallow lake, with no perennial surface inlet or outlet, is at increased risk of contamination from gasoline pollution. In addition, all motors, including electric, particularly in shallow lakes with a thick layer of sediment as Tepee has, stir up sediment and suspend it in the water column, releasing previously trapped phosphates, making the way for increased algal growth and decreasing water quality.<sup>11</sup>

### Human History

While the exact origin of the names Tepee Lake and Tepee Creek have been lost to time, there is no doubt they reflect the extensive use of the North Fork valley by the Kootenai. The Glacier National Park 1911 map is the first these names are found in print.<sup>1</sup> Archaeological evidence shows The “Buffalo (Cow) Trail” from the Tobacco Plains into the North Fork and on east to the prairie was travelled for more than 8,000 years.<sup>2</sup> The Buffalo Trail lies only two miles north of Tepee Lake and when the Kootenai travelled south, their route passed immediately along the east shore of the Lake (See Figure A). Moose were difficult to hunt, but the Kootenai valued their meat and moose were and still are abundant in the willow-rich areas of the North Fork,<sup>3</sup> including in the extensive and diverse wetlands surrounding the Lake<sup>4</sup> where they are frequently seen to the delight of visitors today.



Cody Ling photos at Tepee Lake

The Flathead Forest Reserve was created in 1897, becoming Flathead National Forest in 1933. The Forest was open to homesteading with The Forest Homestead

Act of 1906 and families started coming to the North Fork.<sup>5</sup> Adelbert and Florence Glover packed up their family and ventured out from their maple sugar patch in Maine to 160 acres just NW of Tepee Lake in 1915. Adelbert's son, Lawrence, reminisced to his daughter about regularly meeting up with neighborhood kids to swim at the Lake. They constructed a log float to dive from to avoid the plentiful leeches, in just the same way the Potter family did nearly 100 years later.<sup>6</sup> Neighborhood families have continued to gather at the Lake to swim, canoe, and kayak in every decade since.<sup>7</sup> Adelbert's greatgrandchildren and the descendants of other original homesteaders and early cabin owners are still in the area. The Glover family have lovingly preserved the rustic and historical character of their original homestead, as have many other families.

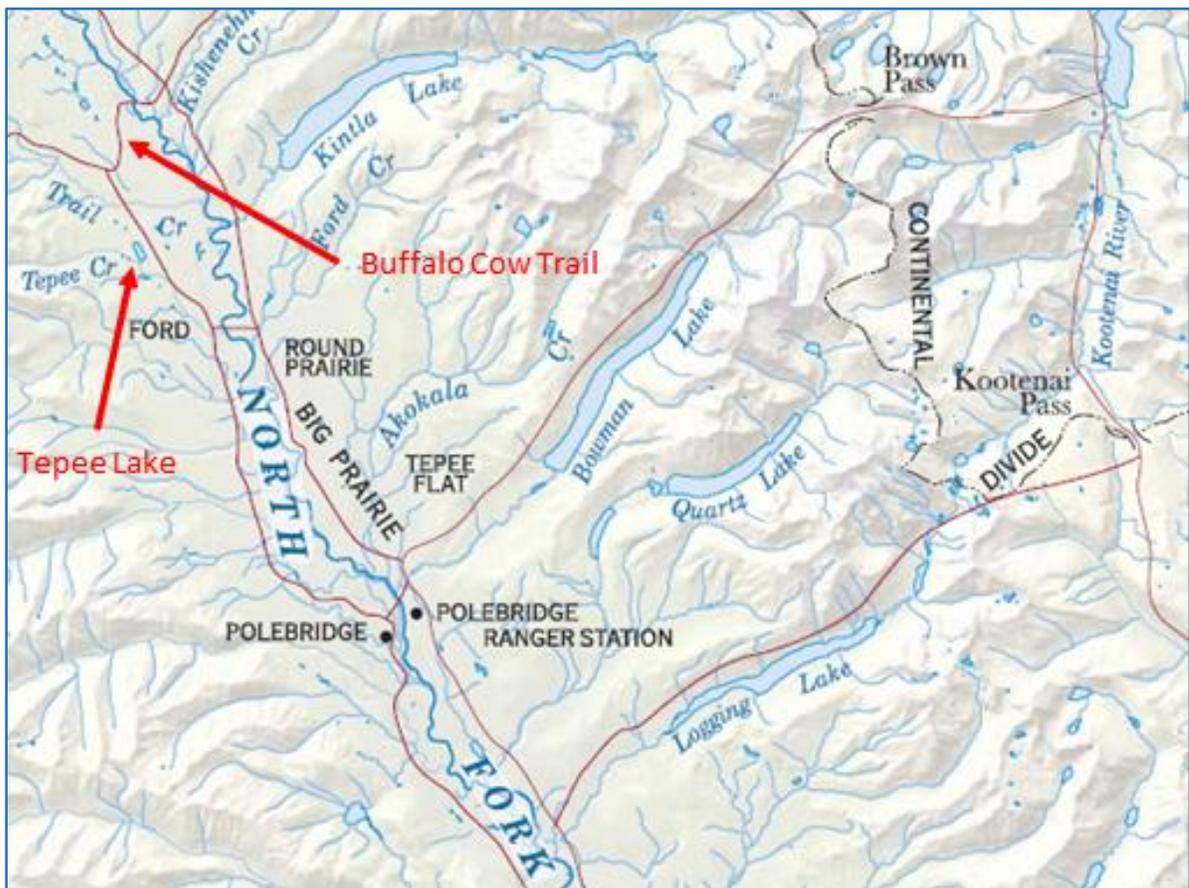
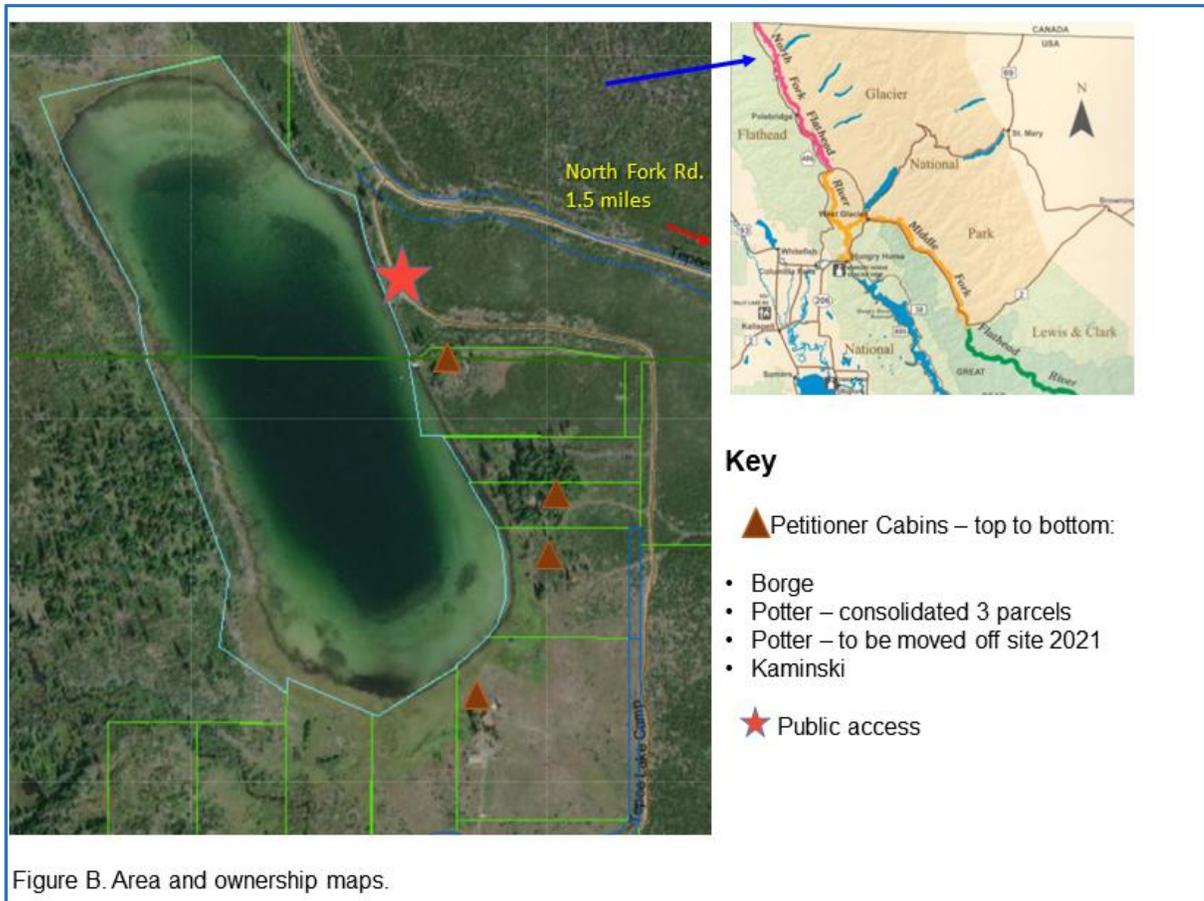


Figure A. Aboriginal trail systems in the North Fork valley<sup>3</sup>

Olaf Borge, a Lutheran pastor and father of two petitioners, made his way from Shelby to the North Fork in 1952 to build the first log cabin on the shores of the Lake. A fourth generation of Borges are still canoeing, swimming and listening to the Loons at night. In the 1960s they put a borrowed motor boat on the Lake, but quickly took it off and never repeated the mistake. "It was a bad idea and none of us could stand it."<sup>8</sup> To this day, no one remembers any other motors on the Lake. The Potters' cabin was built later in the 1950s and two more followed. See Figure B.

Seventy percent of the lakeshore is public land administered by Flathead National Forest. The public accesses the Lake from Rd. 1069 (See Figure B.) It is a

place neighbors and Forest visitors can experience a tranquil piece of the past, listening to Loons, peacefully paddling the Lake with views of the Whitefish Range on one side and Glacier National Park on the other. Visitors are lucky to spot a moose feeding on aquatic vegetation, a grizzly digging for ground squirrels, a beaver cruising the shoreline, trumpeter swans silently gliding along on a stop-over of their spring or fall migration, or maybe even a river otter. Every year, it is getting harder and harder for the public to find quiet, rustic experiences, even on the North Fork, especially that are easily accessible by vehicle. Everyone can still find it at Tepee Lake.



### Natural History

As Pleistocene glaciers receded, they left a deep wide trench between two towering mountain ranges, and the valley of the North Fork of the Flathead River was formed.<sup>9</sup> Teepee Lake and the surrounding wetlands sit six miles south of the Canadian border in a series of depressions left in an undulating ground moraine. Cold water seeps into them year-round from underground springs originating high in the Whitefish Range.<sup>4</sup> The 43 acre lake is 20 feet at its deepest, most of it much shallower (See Figure B.) and has no perennial surface inlet or outlet. Just under a half mile long, it is 875 ft. at its widest.

The Lake sits at the center of the Tepee Lake Complex, rated by Montana Department of Environmental Quality as one of only three sites in the North Fork

(outside of Glacier National Park) that is a Wetland of Outstanding Significance due to its great diversity of wetland plant communities, rare plants and features that are still in a relatively intact state.<sup>4</sup> MT FWP stocked the Lake 29 times between 1940 and 1985, but the fish populations consistently died out, presumably from lack of dissolved oxygen in winter.<sup>10</sup>



Tepee Loons by Dick Pfaff

We don't know how long Common Loons have made Tepee Lake home, but it is likely they were there with the Kootenai, and possibly long before. Being highly susceptible to human disturbance, nesting success throughout their range in Montana is low. They have been given a Montana State Rank of S3, or "potentially at risk because of limited and/or declining numbers, range and/or habitat..."<sup>11</sup> Loon parents will leave the nest when boats come too close, leaving eggs without warmth or protection and vulnerable to predation by bald eagles or other predators. Boat speed and noise compound the challenge while boat wakes can flood nests. Without any protected bays for safe nursery areas, chicks on Tepee Lake could be run over or swamped by power boats since they cannot swim fast or dive. On average 65 pairs attempt to nest in Montana each year, but only 24-26 pairs successfully hatch and raise 1 to 2 chicks each year.<sup>11,12</sup> With so few young surviving, every nesting pair is critical to the survival of the species in Montana. At Tepee Lake, because there is minimal human disturbance, many Loon chicks (23) have survived to fly off in September in the past 30 years.

The Borge family was captivated by the Loons on Tepee Lake as soon as they arrived from Shelby in the 1950s. Olaf was an early member of the Montana Loon Society and installed some of the earliest Loon education signs in the State at the public access. Landowners and neighbors have worked with MT FWP and the USFS to monitor the Loons for years. The Potter family built a floating nesting platform under guidance of MT FWP and nesting success has nearly doubled in the twelve years since. Other neighbors, year after year, spend hours quietly and carefully watching, monitoring and photographing these spectacular birds.

**3. Reason for proposed agency action:**

More and more people are flooding into the North Fork every year, to recreate, buy nearby cabins, and build new ones. We believe it only a matter of time before a new neighbor or visitor brings a motor boat or jet-ski to the Lake. There is currently no motor use of any kind on the Lake, and no history of it. Limiting Tepee Lake to manually powered watercraft will preserve the peace, quiet and rustic historic character that everyone currently enjoys. Now is the time to act, *before* a conflict develops.



Looking west to the Whitefish Range.

**ADOPTION:**

The rule as proposed to be adopted would provide as follows:

Tepee Lake is in Flathead County.

Tepee Lake is limited to manually operated watercraft.

4. Petitioners have no knowledge of any person who may have a particular interest in the proposed agency action, other than support. An oral survey of neighbors, including “old-timers,” did not turn up any current or historical use of motors

with the exception of the one time by petitioners previously noted in section two (2.). Letters of support accompany this petition in separate documents. Additional letters are being submitted by email to the Commission Secretary.

5. Petitioners request a hearing or oral presentation for expression of petitioners' and other interested persons' views.



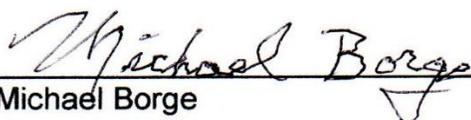
The 2003 Wedge Canyon Fire altered the landscape, but peace and quiet remain.

WHEREFORE, petitioners request the Fish and Game Commission to adopt a rule limiting Tepee Lake in Flathead County to manually powered watercraft.



Kurt Borge

September 18, 2020



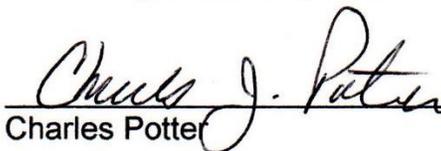
Michael Borge

September 21, 2020



Marguerite Kaminski

September 23, 2020



Charles Potter

September 25, 2020



Rachel Potter

September 25, 2020

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Chance Ling Photography